## ON THE HOUSETOP.

By ROBERT BARR.

Copyright, 1900, by Robert Barr. Gilbert Strong awoke suddenly. Something was wrong, of that he was certain; but what the something was he had but the vaguest idea.

His flat was on the seventeenth floor of the tall Zenith Building, near Fifth avenue, and above the seventeenth floor there was nothing but the flat roof. He liked this elevation, for the air was purer than further below, and the comparative quiet of the situation, high above the turmoil of a New York street, soothed and comforted a literary man.
Gilbert dashed from his bedside to the window.

touched the spring blind, and it flew to the celling. But one glance out and down was needful to tell a New Yorker what the trouble was. Tearing along the side street with alarm gong a-clang rushed the fire engines. The lower sections of the houses on the opposite side of the thoroughfare were aglow with the reflected light of a conflagration just begun, and grim apprehensions thrilled the scantily clad frame of young Strong as he realized that the fire was in the first stories of the tall edifice he occupied. He was paying an exorbitant rent because the Zenith apartment house was fireproof, but somehow this remembrance brought little consolation to him at the moment he stood by the

window. "Fireproof" is an elastic term, and to the average New Yorker it merely means that the skyscraper so designated will occupy a few minutes longer in burning than some others that have not marble stairs, concrete floors and sted frames. Gilbert Strong dressed himself speedily, yet with more deliberation than a man might be expected to use in similar circumstances. He was thinking not of himself but of another-

the occupier of flat 68, his own apartment being 67. He wondered if she had come home the night before; hoping she had not. He had not heard her come in; often listening for the shutting of her door. Four things he knew regarding her: She was the most beautiful woman in the world; her name was Maud Colburn; she was an artist; and, lastly, that he had never been able to summon courage to speak to her, planning for a formal introduction, but always failing to find a proper intermediary. Diffidence melts before a fire. Gilbert Strong strode down the hall and struck his fist lustily against the panels of No. 68. Who is that?"

"Miss Colburn.come out as quickly as you can; the house is on fire. I am your neighbor, Gilbert Strong.

There was a shuddering cry from within, then silence. Strong walked to the elevator and from futile habit rang the electric bell. He heard the jingling far below. Some thought came to him of kicking in the door of the elevator and pulling the wire rope to bring up the car; but through the glass he saw the shaft thick with smoke, and he knew that a breach at the top would but make a roaring furnace of this oky funnel, while the chances of getting down in the car, even if it did come up, were exceedingly remote. As yet the upper hall in which he stood was almost smokeless although a strong smell of burning pine was in the air.

The door of 68 opened and Miss Colburn came out, arrayed with admirable disorder, a loose dressing gown of fascinating color and make around her, the abundant black tresses profuse over her shoulders. He had always seen her in fashionable garb, and thought her the most superb woman of her time; but now she seemed adorable, her beauty heightened by the augmented roses in her cheek, and the appealing glance of fear in her dark eyes.

are we? The electric lights are still burning in the hall.

danger; but we may have to go down the fire escape to the street. " ing. They said it was fireproof."

department, and we must go down some stories yet before we come within their range. Let me excert you to the stairway."

A red lamp indicated the stair. They walked down the marble steps together. Strong noticed that the doors of the flats they passed on the landing were open; a silence as of long halls. The fire had made further progress than he had surmised at first; perhaps the two occupants of the top floor had been forgotten their situation was more serious than he cared to admit even to himself. Two or three flights down the choking smoke began to meet them,

be offered his arm, and she took it, gasping. "I am-I am a coward," she faltered. "I have always had a fear of heights, and vet-

have always had a fear of heights, and yet—
and yet I took that flat. I thought this house
was fireproof. Let us get down, down, down,
and quickly. If one has to fall, the distance
will be less."

He smiled grimly. All they could accomplish in descent would make little difference.

"You must not be afraid. Don't speak,
please, and breathe through your nose. Better
hold your sleeve against your face, and breathe
through that if you can."

But even as he spoke he saw that their endeavors were hopeless. The girl leaned more
and more heavily against him, then with a
moan sank helpless at his feet. He lifted her,
passed down the hall to a window and threw
it open. The cool air revived her, but a glance
through the open window sent her swooning
to the floor. They had not yet come down
to the level of the opposite roof that covered
a ten-story building. Leaving her where she
lay, Gilbert went down the hall and opened
the window at the other end, the wind blowing through almost clearing the passage of
smoke. When he returned she was sitting
with her brow pressed against the sill.

"Leave me," she moaned, "and save yourself

"You don't mind being left alone?"

"Life is impossible here. Come, or I'll carry

you."
She went with him, protesting.
"The roof will be worse at the last."
"It cannot be any worse, and the air will be breathable."

"It cannot be any worse, and the air will be breathable."
He assisted her, and there was need of it. The electric lights had gone out, and the stairways were thick with smoke. In the darkness he groped for the ladder that led to the hatchway, ascended, leaving her clinging to the foot of the ladder; flung up the trap door and caught a glimuse of the soothing starlitely, whose existence he had forgotten as he fought his way from that murky pit.

"Can you climb the ladder?"
"I think so, if you help me a little."
He reached down a hand, and at last lifted her through the square opening and closed the tran-door. Once on the flat roof she swaved slightly, and covered her eyes with her hands as if to shut out any realization of the dizzy height at which she stood. They seemed to be on a scuare, gravel-covered island far above the earth and unconnected with it, or on a very material cloud floating close under the sky. Miss Colburn was the first to sneak.

"How divinely sweet the air is. It is like life. I never seem to have appreciated the pleasure

sky. Miss Colburn was the first to speak.

How divinely sweet the air is. It is like life. I never seem to have appreciated the pleasure of mere breathing or mere living before. How long when will the fire—how short a time have we?

"I hope our days will be long in the land, Miss Colburn. The fire may be out out; they may shoot a rope over this roof; there are a hundred things between us and disaster. I count strongly on the ingenuity of the fire department, and on the bravery of the men. No soldier faces peril more unflinchingly than a fireman."

nan." came closer to him, something almost a smile softening the lines that fear had yn about her line, the lines that fear had yn about her line.

Ou are saying that to comfort me. I had a abse of your face by the open window down ow, and saw that all hope had left you. You we there is no chance for us."

You are entirely mistaken, Miss Colburn, re are many chances in our favor."

Then why have you made no attempt to those in the street know we are here on the How can the fire department do any ig for us if it thinks every tenant has eseld."

from the pavement. Now and then the shrill whistle of an engine calling for coal pierced the throbbing air. The streets were crawling with human black beetles, inefficiently kept within bounds by the police. How familiar the scene seemed, yet Strong had never witnessed it from this point of view, animated by vivid personal interest. These men so far below were battling for his life and for the life of another still more dear to him. He turned back from the parapet and saw her standing where he had left her; the fear she had confessed of dizzy heights returned to her wide open e, es.

lear she had confessed of dizzy heights returned to her wide open 0; es.
"You cannot make them hear?"
"Some one may have heard me, and the word will quickly spread that we are on the roof."
"Then they will shoot the rope over the house-top?"
"They will do something, of that I am assured."

"They will do something, of that I am assured."

"Will the something effect our rescue?"

"Such is my hope. Of course I mentioned that merely as a guess. They understand fighting a fire and I don't. I cannot tell the exact method they will adopt."

"Nevertheless you are sure it will be successful?"

"Ob your "

ful?"
"Oh, yes."
"What a master of fiction you are!"
"Why do you say that?"
"Because as. I said. I saw that all hope left you when we were at the open window down below. And it has not returned."
"Is my face so expressive? In that case I should be a master of acting rather than of fiction. Are you not chilly in this keen air? Your door is open; may I go down and bring you up a wrap?"
"Oh one Law scally warmly cled. It is

door is open; may I go down and bring you up a wrap?"

"Oh, no, no, I am really warmly clad. It is awful to think of any one going down into that stifling pit."

"Then let us walk under the stars for awhile."

He took her unresisting hand and placed it under his arm. They walked along the flat gravelled roof as if they were old friends, she shrinking a little when they approached the parapet, whereupon he turned, remembering her formerly expressed fear.

"It is so humiliating to be a coward," she said, seeing he had noticed her shudder.

"You do yourself scant justice." he replied.
"I think you a very brave woman."

"That is delusion on your part. You are actually brave, and so I may appear a pale reflection of courage, if I am even that. You are brave and I am pretending to be. How did you know my name was Maud Colburn?"

"It is engraved on a brass plate on your door."

The girl laughed lightly.

The girl laughed lightly.

The girl laughed lightly.

So it is. I had forgotten. A lady presented it to me when I took that flat, and so it has remained where she put it. There is no name

remained where she put it. There is no name on your door."

"No. May I introduce myself? I am called——"
"You are Gilbert Strong, whose latest book all America is reading. Such a success must be very gratifying."

"It was yesterday."

"Ah, you speak in the past tense There is more truth in your 'was' than in your opti mistic remarks about our rescue. Then I was right—all hope has fled."

"Quite the contrary. Hope is newly awakened."

ened."
"Why, what has happened?"
"I am talking with you."
"I know. But what has that to do with the "I know. But what has that to do with the fire?"

"To tell the truth, I was not thinking of the fire."

"I do not understand you. Of what, then, were you thinking?"

"Of the pleasures of hope, to use an old literary title. And now that books are our subject, may I ask what will seem a conceited question: Have you read my last?"

"Your latest, you mean. Yes, and I have wanted to speak with you about its title. Why did you call it 'Inspiration?' I suppose I am very dull, but I could find little connection between the name and the story."

"Well, one critic said it was because I had so much self-esteem that I thought myself inspired; another that I supposed it was a catchy name; and a third that it cost less to advertise a book whose title was a single word than one designated by a phrase."

"Yes, but what was the real reason?"

"Yes, but what was the real reason?"
"The first man was right."
"What? That you thought yourself inspired?"
"I was inspired."
"Oh!"

"I was inspired."
"Oh!"
"Are you very much shocked? It is the truth, and I wanted to tell you about it if I thought the recital would not tire you. May I?"
"I'll tell you when I'm tired. Go on."
"Thank you. Well, to understand the situation you should have read one or more of my other books; but they are volumes nobody bought."

my other books; but they are volumes nobody bought."

Maud Colburn laughed.

"I have the six on one shelf all by themselves.

"Oh, you are not gone!"

"I was waiting for you."

"That is kind of you. We are not in danger, ire we? The electric lights are still burning in the hall."

"Yes, that is a good sign. No, we are in no langer; but we may have to go down the fire scape to the street."

"But there are no fire escapes on this build-not. They said it was fireproof."

"They will say anything in New York. It is meaning the wheeled escapes of the fire."

"I may other books; but they are volumes nobody bought."

Maud Colburn laughed.

"I have the six on one shelf all by themselves. Having wring that admission from me, please go on. Don't be professional with your "To be continued in our next suspense. I'm impatient for climaxes, and that is why I never read a story in serial form."

"You shall have no further complaint to make of my diffidence. Set an author thinking of his immortal works and he never knows when to stop. The first five books were deserved fallures, because I could not depict a woman. With the women were simply sticks."

"Oh, I don't agree with you, Mr. Strong, you are now going to the other extreme, and self-depreciation is almost as bad as self-conceit. Your women were always charming—a little too good, if anything."

"You mean too goody-goody; in truth, they were not alive at all. They were not fixed in my own mind and naturally I could not write convincingly of them so that they might remain for a moment in the reader's recollection. Why, in one of my books the heroine has black hair in the first chapters, and is a blonde to-ward the end of the volume!"

"Oh, that is quite true to life," said Maud with a laugh.

"Not with the kind of girl I was trying to picture," replied Strong, Joining in the merriment of his companion. "However, that girl does not matter; she was a mere phantom, like all her sisters. But one day I saw a real woman. I tremble now to think how near I came to taking a car, for then I would have missed her. But, thank God! I walked and so I met her.

"How delightful! In prosy old New York, too, I suppose?"

"Oh Brooklyn Bridge."

"Oh, worse and worse. What a spot for so enchanting a meeting."

"What! Don't you like Brooklyn Bridge? To me it is—"

"Oh, I daresay. Please go on with your story. You are at a most interesting point."

"But I can't have you do injustice to my favorite structure. Just pause a moment and look at that bridge. See how it hangs against the dark sky, a very necklace of pearls. Could anything be more beautiful?"

From their great elevation the immense bridge was plainly outlined with points of light. The girl withdrew her hand from his arm, and stood a step further from him, while he with great enthusiasm and no little eloquence bridge was plainly outlined with points of light. The girl withdrew her hand from his arm, and stood a step further from him, while he with great enthusiasm and no little eloquence bridge was plainly outlined with points of light. The girl withdrew her hand from his arm, and stood a step further from him, while he with great enthusiasm and no little eloquence bridge was plainly outlined with points of light. The girl withdrew her hand from his arm, and stood a step further from him, while he with great with a suppose of the proper with a suppose of the proper wi

"She is both the inspiration and the heroine."

"How charming. Did she help you with the actual writing of the book, or was she only the model?"

"I don't like your word 'only.' Were it not for her, the book would never have been written. You see, her presence was so strongly stamped upon my memory that when I wrote she was before me—almost as if actually there. All I had to do was to put that woman in my book, and success was mine. Although the public has praised the so-called creation, I alone know how far it has fallen short of the reality. But I did my best, hoping not for their approval, but for hers."

"And did you get it?"

"I am not sure that I did."

"Have you asked her about it?"

"We have discussed the book together. At first I thought she liked it, but afterward I began to have doubts."

"Probably the poor girl has no opinion one way or the other; she wants to say what will please you, but is uncertain of her ground. I know of no situation more embarrassing. You literary people are so sensitive that misplaced praise is almost as disastrous as blame."

"Do you know many literary people?"

"I know one novelist. Is the Lady Superba aware that she is the heroine of your book?"

"Then she can't be very clever. Still, I am doubtless doing her an injustice. She probably knows all about it, and plumes herself greatly on the fact to all her friends except

"Oh, never!"
"I had to. Do you think I was going to run
the risk of losing her now that I had found
her? I determined to learn where she lived.
I succeeded."

I succeeded."
"And then arranged an introduction—or was an introduction necessary? Perhaps you simply called on her and said: 'I am Mr. Gilbert Strong.'" rong."
L. really, Miss Colburn, you are nearer

bert Strong."

"Well. really, Miss Colburn, you are nearer the truth than you imagine."

"Ah, if that is the case, I don't think much of your Lady Superba."

"That is not the worst you have said of her."

"Oh, what I said before was merely by way of a joke, or rather with the purpose of bantering you. You were so much in earnest. What did I say that offended you?"

"You called her a coward."

"What!"

"Down by the open window you called my Lady Superba a coward. I say and said she is the bravest woman in the world.

Maud Colburn stepped back a pace or two, and stood with clasped hands and bent head, her eyes on the gravelled floor at her feet. He could see her face plainer now—pale at first, then slowly flushing. Her mind, he surmised, was retreading the steps of their conversation, adjusting sequel to precedence. When she looked up her brow was glorified by the salutation of the coming day.

"How beautiful is the dawn," she whispered. He glanced over his shoulder and saw the widening band of light along the eastern horizon.

"Yes," he said: "but more beautiful is the Goddess of the Dawn."

"It was I, then, whem you met on the Bridge?"

"Yes."

"How incredible it seems that I should not

"Yes."
"How incredible it seems that I should not have seen you!"
"It was the fashion then to look straight ahead, you remember."
"Ah, I am afraid I did not see very far ahead

"Ah, I am afraid I did not see very far ahead that day."
"I did. I saw you and me standing together somewhere alone. I heard myself say: 'My lady, I love you;' but there prophetic instinct deserted me, and I could not hear your answer."
"The answer! I fear no prophet was needed to fortell the answer, Gilbert. I hinted that your mythical Lady Superba was too easily won; and now, when I might set her an example of austerity, I find myself following her too complacent lead. Are you answered, sir,"
"Almost beyond my hopes, and far beyond."

sir?"
"Almost beyond my hopes, and far beyond my deserts."
He took her willing bands and drew her to him, his kiss lightly touching brow and cheek, finding its abiding place on her thrilling lips.
Suddenly she pushed him from her, starting back. The trapdoor was rising and a wet helmet had appeared, angering the young man with its unnecessary intrusion, for did not the whole world belong solely to her and to him? You're all right," said the man in the helmet. "The fire is out."
"What—what fire?" stammered Gilbert

TREES FOR PRAIRIE LAND.

Government Movement That Promises to Be of Great Value to the West. To claim the treeless prairie land which is

To claim the treeless prairie land which is now practically valueless and by the setting out and maintaining groves to make the land financially profitable for timber and orchard purposes is the design of a plan of practical tree planting recently established by the Division of Forestry of the Department of Agriculture. Requests for aid from the Department in the establishing of tree plantations have come in fast from most of the States in the Union, but more than 90 per cent. of them are from the bare and treeless regions of Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska and the Dakotas, where trees are badly needed for protection to stock and buildings and for fuel, posts, and general timber uses.

What is being done in this line is told in a recently issued pamphlet by J. W. Toumey, out and maintaining groves to make the land purposes is the design of a plan of practical tree planting recently established by the Divithe Union, but more than 90 per cent, of them Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska and the Dakotas,

where the control of the control of

SUN, SUNDAY, JULY 1, 1900.

The control is the tree word in the control in the co you. Nevertheless, I should like very much to meet her. Will you introduce me?"

I should be delighted, but I fear you would not do her justice."

Oh, yes, I would. My estimate would probably be much nearer the truth than yours. We women are said to be severe critics of each other. In reality, we are true critics, which a cynical person might say was the same thing. Have I said anything which makes you think I should be unfair in my judgment of her?"

"Yes, you have."

"Yes, you have."

"Oh, well, I was talking carelessly. Besides, it is all your fault in being so exasperatingly slow in your telling of a story. You went along all right when you began; but latterly I have had to ask question after question, getting my answers mostly in monosyllables. One would think I was your rival in the affections of Superba, and that you were determined to give me as little information as possible. Even now you haven't finished your story. You met her on Brooklyn Bridge. What then? Did she take any notice of you?"

"Not the slightest. I doubt if she saw me; she was looking straight ahead."

"Yes, that was the fashion two years ago. What next?"

"I forgot instantly what was taking me over to Brooklyn; I turned and followed her."

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"I had to be the fashion two years ago. where the fashion to the position of the player who makes the raise it may indicate either strength or comparative weakness in his cards and it may serve either to swell t

When an advertiser has something of real value to dispose of, he first goes to THE SUN's advertising columns with ft,—Adv.

be hadn't had a wash nor a shave since he started out, an' he had a black eye that would have disgraced a church plenic. He was playin shoon, and he never looked up when a hear came in, but kept right on playing as if he didn't care a cuss for nobody, which he didn't.

I hadn't care a cuss for nobody, which he didn't.

I had to grant he was for nobody, which he didn't.

I had to grant he was for nobody, which he didn't.

I had to grant he was he was the hill, with Miss Alice knox, the jester, dressed in red don't.

I had to grant he was for nobody, which he didn't.

I had to grant he was for nobody, which he didn't.

I had to grant he was for him, and he went right on showin the cards out, like he hadn't acuse and the store.

I had to grant he was for the store to morrow. But Bill he were said no showin the cards out, like he hadn't acuse and the while. Abner spoke again. Ain't you comin' home to-misht, Bill' he says. We meed you in the store.

I had the while, Abner spoke again. Ain't you comin' home to-misht, Bill' he says.

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I had the while, Abner spoke again. Ain't you comin' home to-misht.

Able the was the spoke again. Ain't you comin' home to-misht.

I had the was the spoke again. Ain't you comin' home to-misht.

I had the was the spoke again. Ain't

NEW AND DISTRESSING.

A Malady Resulting From the Use of a Modern Article of Featinine Attire.

From the Washington Exercises Star.

"A new and stranges malady has appeared in Washington," said a Connecticul avenue plussician, "which has afflicted several of my patients, and which hide fair to attack the gentle sex as the season advances.

"I was called in by the burshand of a lady, who told me in great alarm that while she was preparing for the theatre she was sicied with said, deen and violent convulsions of the head, needs and vertebra. Her sufferings were very senter the symptoms finally becoming so severe that her head was twisted around to one side to the extent that she faced backward.

"I was much concerned on the way from my office to the house as the indications pointed to strychnine convulsions.
"If our the lady's head furned quite around, indicating a serious wrench of the spinal column and the maxeles of the neck. She was in a stain of comm. I applied restoratives. After consumering the neck she was made to the house as the indications pointed to strychnine convulsions.
"If our the lady's head furned a quite around, indicating a serious wrench of the spinal column and the maxeles of the neck. She was in a stain of comm. I applied restoratives. After consumering the search of sufficient duration and vigor to form a permanent position of the misside the following wear manuscular tension. I was also forther manufactures and the file blancating of the darkward to her intended the stream of the suite of the spinal column and the maxeles of the neck. She was in a stain of comment that the file of her his band. Luckily for her the tension had not been of sufficient duration and vigor to form a permanent position of the mission judge and the college for the following year may been rather awas ward for her to have gone the left shoulder while the remainder of her body walked east.

"To discussion that the given the file of her his band of the college for the following year may be a start of the file of the

which is now coming into vogue, is based on the supposition that the great majority of telephone messages can really be condensed into a minute's conversation when once the subscribers are connected up. The object of introducing this service was that the standard five minutes' service was too expensive, with long-distance telephones, to be at all popular. The one-minute is, therefore, charged for at the rate of one-fifth of what it would have been for a five-minute service, with a minimum charge of 15 cents for one minute. Thus the rate for points between 100 and 200 miles from each other is 20 cents a minute. For a distance of thirty-five miles the charge is 15 cents a minute and five cents for each additional